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THEOSOPHY AND THEOSOPHISTS

BY
C. JINARAJADASA

*(An Address delivered at a Convention of the
Theosophical Society in Holland, in
Amsterdam, December 1, 1929)*

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BROTHERS,

As you are aware, I have just returned from a twelve months' tour in South and Central America, and am on my way back to India. It was not my intention to lecture during my brief stay in England while waiting for my steamer; and it was not my plan to come to you at Amsterdam on the way to India. I have managed to circumvent invitations to lecture in England; but as regards Holland, I have changed my mind, at the solicitation of your National Council and National Board. I have arranged to be with you for just a few hours, on my way to India. I have been given my subject, for I am asked to address you on "an *exposé* of Theosophy such as is fit for the present mentality of people, also of those who want 'pure Theosophy'."

In the sixteen countries of Latin America where I have worked, Theosophy presents itself to our members there as a gospel of wonderful Idealism; our Movement is still in many ways in its infancy in those countries, and to our Latin American members Theosophy still retains its wonderful bloom and charm. But I am aware that, in Europe, the bloom of Theosophy seems no longer to exist for many, for we hear to-day of a "new Theosophy" as distinct from an "old Theosophy," of a "pure

Theosophy" as different from a mixed or diluted Theosophy. Therefore many are troubled.

One cause for this distress is that just now there are many varieties of activities among Theosophists. Once, to be a Theosophist meant only to attend lectures and study classes, or to give lectures or conduct study classes. But, to-day, to many, to be a Theosophist means to "theosophise" the world in all departments of its activities. So Theosophists are busy, originating or associating themselves with all sorts of movements for reform in religion, in art, in industry, in politics, and in other departments too numerous to mention.

Therefore, just as "one cannot see the wood for the trees," so it is hard to find Theosophy, so some say, because of the Theosophical activities. And as some of these many activities are proclaimed, on the supposed authority of Masters of Wisdom, as urgently necessary for the helping of humanity, the result is that those who dedicate themselves to one or other of these activities are intensely one-pointed, and they appear to their critics to proclaim to the world as Theosophy, not "pure Theosophy," but only a very limited aspect of it. Some go so far as to say that what these enthusiasts proclaim is not Theosophy at all, but on the other hand what is contrary to Theosophy.

Another cause of unrest among our members is the emphasis which Mr. Krishnamurti has made on certain aspects of Truth. Some have felt that in order to accept him it is necessary to reject Theosophy. Yet since they still feel the inspiration of Theosophy, they do not know how to reconcile

what appear to be contradictions between Mr. Krishnamurti's teachings and Theosophy.

It seems to me that much of this distress of mind is due to lack of a clear comprehension of two things: first, what is Theosophy, and second, what is the purpose for which the Theosophical Society was founded. Let us examine these two, and let me begin with the second, the T.S.

You are all aware that, in the public mind, the T.S. is identified with a philosophy called "Theosophy". Some think it is a new religion, others some philosophy of the Hindus which has come to oust Christianity from its place in the Western world. But, after allowing for all misconceptions and misrepresentations, one fact is obvious—that the T.S., the Parent Society, and the Lodges of its National Societies, are busy proclaiming a philosophy of life labelled Theosophy. Now, the T.S. as an organisation works under a Constitution; are you aware that in that Constitution of the Society, the word "Theosophy" is not mentioned? Nowhere is it said that the object of the Society is to proclaim Theosophy. In no part of our Constitution is there any reference to Theosophy as a philosophy of life, and therefore of course not the slightest attempt to define what Theosophy is or is not. The purpose of the Society is to form here below on earth a nucleus of Brotherhood—an effective nucleus of men and women who are tolerant and spiritual, and who embrace within their interests all races, creeds, castes and colours, and both the sexes.

Just as there is no definition of Theosophy in the Constitution, so too there is no definition of

what constitutes a Theosophist. The word "Theosophist" does not appear—only the words "Fellow, or member of the Society".

What is the result? Just this: that within the Society, as an organisation working with a Constitution, no one has the right to say, "This is Theosophy, that is not"; nor, "This man is a Theosophist, that man is not". I say, no one has a *right*; that does not debar any one from saying so. A man may think it his duty to say so. Only, his action is not one in which the Constitution is interested. The Constitution is interested in the member, not because he bears the label "Theosophist," but because he is one who accepts the ideal of Universal Brotherhood, and presumably is helping the world to realise it.

Note, then, clearly that, within the Society, no one has the right to define what constitutes Theosophy or Theosophist. Each member is given perfect freedom to have his own ideas on the matter. The terms "new Theosophy," "pure Theosophy," and so on may be convenient as labels for a particular group of persons, in a campaign on behalf of what they consider to be Theosophy, against another group of persons which holds different views; but such labels have no basis in fact, for the simple reason that nowhere is Theosophy defined.

It is very important that all members of the T.S. should recognise that they have no cult of any kind to offer to the world—for men and women of all cults can join the Society; and that the Society as a whole has no philosophy to which it is committed. The Society has three Objects; but it

says nowhere how those Objects are to be applied in practice. The Christian who believes in a Personal God is welcome as a member ; but no less welcome is the Buddhist who denies the very existence of God. Nor does the Society limit the freedom of any member. Those who accept Mr. Krishnamurti's teachings to the letter, and those who do not, those who are Liberal Catholics, and those who object to ritual religion in any form, have as members the same status within the Society. They can hold any office, including that of the President of the Society, if a majority of members elects them.

If a majority of members so desire, they can change the Objects of the Society, but it requires a long legal process to do so. Our Constitution is in two parts ; the first part is called the " Memorandum of Association ". It mentions the Objects and the general structure of the Society as an organisation. The second part is called the " Rules and Regulations ". This Memorandum of Association and the Rules and Regulations were drafted in their present form in 1895 by Colonel Olcott and a special committee ; then, after the National Societies had accepted them, they were presented to the legal authorities of the Government of Madras, and the Society was on April 3, 1905, made into a legal entity capable of holding property and transacting certain kinds of business mentioned in the Constitution. The Society is registered in Madras as a charitable institution, and therefore pays no income tax nor a tax on its property.

Now our Constitution provides a method for changing that part of it called " Rules and Regulations ".

Three months' notice must be given of any proposed change, and at a regular or extraordinary meeting of the General Council of the Society, any rule can be changed by voting. But the strange thing is that the Constitution provides no means for changing that part of it termed "Memorandum of Association," where appear our Objects. At first it looks as if there is no way to change our present Objects. But lawyers assure me that the High Court of Madras has power to authorise a modification in the Objects also. A mere process of voting by members is not enough; since the Society is a legal entity, any modification of its fundamental structure must be authorised by that department of the Government of Madras which originally made the Society into a legal entity. Should therefore a majority of members ask for a change in the "Memorandum of Association," the minority have the right to argue their case against any such change, before the High Court, and it is for the judges then to give the final decision, whether the change is allowable or not.

I have thus far presented to you what may be termed the theoretical aspect of the Society. But, in practice, the Society is identified with certain ideas. In the public mind, the T. S. exists to proclaim Theosophy; and such an assumption is perfectly natural. Everyone of us as a member is identified more or less with Theosophy as a philosophy, some more and some less; for though a person can join believing only in the principle of Brotherhood, he does not, as a rule, join the T. S. merely because of Brotherhood. Even if he may

not believe in Reincarnation or Karma, he has no violent objection to them, or he would not join our particular band of workers in the cause of Idealism. Therefore, in the public mind, a member of the T. S. is identified with Theosophy.

From this arises the practical application, that every member is involved in what is being proclaimed on our platforms, and in our literature, as Theosophy. Yet, as I have pointed out, no one has the right to say what constitutes or does not constitute Theosophy. However, each one of us does exercise such a right, though it is not granted by our Constitution. Therefore, like everybody else, I am going to say what Theosophy is to me.

Within the Society, we are of many creeds, and of none, but there is one profession of faith which we all heartily accept, and that is, the wonderful hidden nature in man. We may dispute whether God is a Personal God or an Impersonal God, but none of us Theosophists doubts that man, the ordinary man and the ordinary woman, enshrines something so wonderful and great that we can only describe it with the phrase "the Nature of God". On what man is we are all agreed—that he is not merely the body, and that he is not just the mere weak and sinful aspect which he reveals more frequently in life than any other. On the other hand, man is a Divine Thing, a Mystery, a Holy of Holies, which in some incomprehensible way contains the Totality, even while he continues to be such a pitiful unit in that Totality.

It is this idealisation of man which unites us in common ideals of service towards mankind. When

we look at the greatest and wisest of men, at Christ and at Buddha, at Plato and at Newton, at Aeschylus and at Columbus, we thrill with inspiration in the knowledge that all their wisdom and greatness exist in every man and in every woman of our cities and of our fields.

It is because of our Gospel of Man that we Theosophists have already made such a mark on the intellectual and emotional life of the world. Every Theosophical Lodge shines invisibly with a flame which lights up for the inquirer the puzzling world around him. To be a Theosophist is to me to have an unbounded belief in the greatness of man.

But it is just because our idealism of man is so powerful, that we are not mere students of a philosophy but revolutionary reformers for the betterment of man. If every man enshrines the Divine Nature within him, it is the duty of every one of us, who has glimpsed that truth, to work until every barrier which stands in man's way is removed, till every chain that binds the Hidden God in man is broken. But in this work for the salvation of man, the Theosophists are not unique; there are thousands of other reformers. But the Theosophist is unique because, as he works at reform, he has a vision of the Goal. It is this Goal which is meant by our well known phrase, "the Plan of God."

We take care not to define who, or what, God is; we leave each individual to discover that mystery, and to state it to himself according to his vision and his need. But all of us join in a second profession of faith, which is, that nothing happens by chance, and that in this seeming chaotic world of

events there is yet a plan, such a plan as the human mind can understand.

Though nobody has defined what Theosophy is, yet as a matter of fact, there is a tradition of truth of the past and of the present which tends towards an ocean of truth, just as all streams tend towards the ocean. This ocean of truth is not a creed, but rather a statement of nature's laws ; it is imposed on none under threat of penalties, yet on the other hand its understanding is the first step towards happiness. While the T.S. has no philosophy to offer, we Theosophists do have such a philosophy. And all the time as we offer our philosophy, we have to remember that we are only members of the T.S., and that we have no more intrinsic right to call ourselves Theosophists than any other group of reformers in the world. I hope I make myself clear to you, though I appear to be contradicting myself again and again.

In what places must we look to find the Divine Wisdom ? It is on this point that differences may arise. Just now, some would limit themselves to a living teacher, like Mr. Krishnamurti, and say that the only wisdom which the world needs is that which he brings, and that all previous expressions of the Wisdom are supplanted by that of the present. It is this same attitude which we find in the true Christian, or the true Hindu, or the true Buddhist, to whom his Teacher is not dead but living still. The man of religion who is a power to change the world is he who feels in every fibre of his being that his Lord and Master is actually living and moving in the world now, even as He did centuries ago.

There are others, who believe that the practical application of the Wisdom to a co-operation with the Plan of God consists in becoming the disciple of a Guru or Master, and in reflecting that Guru's thought in the least little thing of life. It is by living the life of a disciple that he discovers one by one the many meanings in life. Then there are others, for whom in order to come to the Wisdom it is necessary to consecrate themselves to a work for men as mediator between man and God. They find the Wisdom, as do the philosophic ritualists of Hinduism, as they study the intricate rituals which they hold to be inspired by God to reflect His thought.

Now it seems to me that the attitude of the true Theosophist is one of eager acceptance of Truth from whatever source it comes. We who have been students of Theosophy already know that every religion contains a part of the Truth, and no one religion all of it; I think the true Theosophist understands religion in a deeper way than does the devotee of any one particular religion. Many of us also know, by direct experience, how both science and art and philosophy bring us to the Wisdom. Moreover, some of us know how those hidden facts of life vaguely termed "Occultism" have shown us yet more glimpses of the Wisdom.

True, most of us cannot prove the assertions of Occultism, or of whatever else is the gospel which moulds our thinking. But does that matter? For what is important to us is not what our faith—Occultism, or an old teaching like Christianity, or a new teaching like Mr. Krishnamurti's—has to

say of life, but what we ourselves have to say about life. Everything which we accept from outside helps us only if we discover what we are in our inner selves. And Occultism, proved or unproved, does help us to find ourselves, and so to gain a clearer vision of our place in the Great Plan.

Similar is the experience of the disciple of a Guru, if the Guru has achieved Liberation and so is Perfect Man. Whether the Guru be visible or invisible is of little consequence, for the Guru does not so much reveal Truth to the disciple, as the disciple to himself. The ancient maxim "Know Thyself" gains a new meaning when the disciple looks first at the Guru and then at himself. The Guru is not a prop or crutch; he is a standard. If ever we attempt to make the Guru into a prop or a crutch, the result is disaster.

Those who try to understand themselves or to understand God's Plan—they are like two poles of one force—inevitably find that Wisdom cannot be acquired by mere study or contemplation. Wisdom and Action are inseparable; wise action follows from wisdom, but not less does wisdom grow by wise action. It was said magnificently that Wisdom "mighty and sweetly ordereth all things". For the Wisdom of God is not an abstraction, but the power of His thought as it moulds perfection out of imperfection. Therefore, in a reverse fashion, whoever tries to change this imperfect world into something more perfect is nearer the Wisdom than the man who withdraws from the world to understand it by contemplation.

An interesting example of the truth that wisdom grows by wise action occurs in the history of our own T.S. For the first four years, in New York, the Society was merely a society to study Occultism; it did not grow. The moment it began its work in the East, in India and Ceylon, the gospel of Theosophy became a gospel of putting right whatever was wrong in those countries. The philosophical Theosophist was made to feel that he must be the active Theosophist also.

I think it is no exaggeration to say that the remarkable growth of the T.S., since Dr. Besant became President, is due to the transformation which she brought in our understanding of Theosophy. She insisted that the Theosophist's duty is not only to understand the world, but also to "theosophise" it. And wherever Theosophical Lodges did attempt to "theosophise" the community, the Lodges became centres of life, even if sometimes the members active in the "Order of Service" merely duplicated the efforts of non-theosophists, and so added nothing new to the world's reforms. But the principle which Dr. Besant insisted upon—that Wisdom grows by action—is eternally true concerning every truth; we know Truth not only by contemplating it, but also by trying to make it a power in the lives of others.

When the idealist sets out to put his ideals into practice, then he commits blunders which are obvious to others, though not to himself. I have already mentioned one criticism which has been made against Theosophists who are working to "theosophise" the world, that they are duplicating the efforts of

non-theosophists uselessly. A far more fundamental criticism of all reformers is that which Mr. Krishnamurti has made with his well-known statement that "the individual problem is the world problem". Most of us, who are keen on any kind of reform, fail to realise that the success of our work depends fundamentally on our character, and not on our gospel. Just because of our gospel is wonderful, we forget that it is our duty to make ourselves wonderful also. We find thousands of enthusiasts lavishly sacrificing their all, without making much headway in their reforms.

Therefore we Theosophists owe a deep debt of gratitude to Mr. Krishnamurti for pointing out to us one of our great weaknesses. How many Theosophists are there not, who are working hard for Brotherhood, but are very little brotherly in the Lodge or in the home or the community? For it is so easy to blind ourselves with any gospel which makes us feel we have in us something great. I sometimes think that we are fanatical along one particular line of service, only because we have omitted another line of service where really lies our duty.

Undoubtedly we Theosophists have to take up the challenge which Mr. Krishnamurti has thrown down to all idealists, with his statement that, as is the individual, so is the world. He would have us work at our own characters first, before we presume to lead the world. Yet if all of us were to wait till our characters were perfect, before attempting to help the world, many millions would suffer. Nevertheless it is utterly true that, unless we work with a right

character, part at least of our work must be wrong. Once, Pilate asked, "What is truth?" To-day, the question is rather, "What is service?" I do not propose offering an answer, because I have none. We are before great contradictions, and must take them to be what they are. But I do not think contradictions matter. Who are we to expect that the problem of Truth must at each stage convince us, just as we ourselves are to-day with our small stock of experience?

I think sometimes that Truth is only expressible in contradictions. Let me place before you two contradictory lines of action in the two statements, first, "Make the perfect citizen, and the result is the perfect State," and second, "Make the perfect State, and the perfect citizen is the result". The one aims at perfecting the individual first, and the other aims at perfecting first the community. Of course the two methods are contradictory. What is the solution?

I will suggest one, and that only hesitatingly. It is, that the better of the two ways depends on the need of the world at a given epoch. The world has a curious cyclic life of its own; for instance, if we analyse civilisation, we shall find men's interests changing, back and forth like the swing of a pendulum, from an interest in God to an interest in man, and after that period, from an interest in man to an interest in God again. During the Middle Ages, the interest in God overrode the interest in man; to-day it is the reverse, and the problem of the perfecting of man is far more interesting than the problem of the understanding of God. In the

world to-day, what with machinery and standardisation and the frantic appeal of civilisation to live on the surface of as many things as possible, Mr. Krishnamurti's gospel that "the individual problem is the world problem" comes as a messenger of light to guide us towards a reconstructed world.

Those of us who prize our membership of the T.S. have always one standard with which to measure all things before us. We may be many things—a Theosophist and a priest, a Theosophist and an artist, a Theosophist and a party politician, and so on. But as a member of the T.S., when the question is, How should a Lodge or a Section, or the whole Society act, our standard is, "What is the T.S. for? To establish and foster Brotherhood." It is not the purpose of the T.S. to show where lies truth and where lies error; the Society's duty, declared by its first Object, is to show where lies cruelty and where lies kindness. It seems to me that as Theosophists it is our duty to condemn nothing, unless it is something which fosters cruelty and so is against Brotherhood.

And since we are less proclaimers of truth and far more seekers of truth, it is surely our duty to accept truth whencesoever it comes. Whether truth comes from the lips of a World Teacher of a bygone day, or from the lips of a World Teacher in our own, its message will be accepted by us with rejoicing. But if there are contradictions?

There can be none. One truth cannot contradict another truth. Perhaps one idea which we label as truth is error after all; then necessarily there appears contradiction. But we must welcome every

contradiction which will make us test the foundations of each belief we trust in as truth. The man who knows is never afraid of a challenge; it is he who merely believes who fears, and so resents a challenge.

So, in these days, when new truths are appearing on the horizon of our knowledge, it is not a matter of "new truths for old," but rather, "new truths added to old truths". And since truth in every form, in every age and in every setting, is but a particle of the one Infinite Wisdom, let us be deeply grateful for every event, pleasant or unpleasant, which adds to the stock of knowledge which to-day we call Theosophy. If there is something in our Theosophy of to-day which is error masquerading as truth, let us discard it; but what we do then is not a giving up of Theosophy, but rather a receiving of it.

I have nothing more to add, on this subject of "Theosophy and Theosophists". You will probably say that I have left many questions unanswered. That is true, and do you know why? The reason is that no one but ourselves can show us the solution to our puzzles. Not the wisest of men, not even a Master of the Wisdom, can make clear your perplexities. What they can do for you is to tell you to look again and again into your own self, and if you fail to find light there, to look again more attentively. That has been my task also—to ask you to look within you. As I have spoken to you of my unbounded enthusiasm for Theosophy and the Theosophical Society, it has not been to speak to you as an authority having solutions to

your problems, but rather as a brother urging you to have more trust in yourself, and to look within your own self for your solutions.

I can give you one counsel, and that I do, feeling utterly sure that it is a wise counsel. I have now forty-three years' experience of Theosophists, and I have witnessed many troublous times in the T. S. And I have noted during such periods, how some lost their trust in those whom they considered leaders, lost their faith in the existence of the Masters, and finally lost their interest in Theosophy also. Whatever be your future—whether you lose trust in leaders, whether your faith vanishes, whether you leave the T. S. itself—never cease to work for Brotherhood. Within the ranks of the T. S., or outside of the T. S., work for Brotherhood. That Work is the road from your darkness to light, from your doubt to truth. For, if it is the Divine Wisdom which you seek, then remember that, "Loving action is the Divine Wisdom at work, and whoso acts lovingly will inevitably come to the Wisdom".

C. JINARAJADASA

